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THE GOSPEL VERSUS THE BIBLE

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The other day I heard a prominent churchman speaking of the importance of being "saturated with the Bible." It is a common expression, and I am not disposed to find fault with its use. To be saturated with the Bible is to have a treasure of priceless value stored away in one's mind, and this is true whether one looks at the matter from a merely literary or from a religious point of view. I should like to suggest, however, that to be *saturated with the gospel* is an even more vital matter and one which we all too seldom hear urged.

Let it be understood that "the gospel," in this sense, is not to be identified with the gospels—the records that have come down to us under the names of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. The gospel is the "good news" which Jesus brought and still brings to men; and that good news, as I understand it, is primarily *himself*. It is not conceivable, I think, that any other news which humanity might receive would be as good as the news that such a life as that of Jesus was not only possible but actual, that such a spirit as his could inhabit and did inhabit a body of flesh and blood, that his point of view could be and was both taught and lived. It is the best possible news for humanity because it shows how weakness may be turned into strength, folly into wisdom, strife into peace, impurity into purity, hate into love, sin into righteous-

ness, death into life—in short, it shows how men may be "saved," in all the breadth and depth of meaning which that great little word contains. Therefore when I speak of being saturated with the gospel I mean being saturated with Christ—his spirit, his attitude, his point of view, himself.

Now of course the first requisite in such a program is to know about Christ, and assuredly the logical starting-point for one who would learn about Christ is in the New Testament books which contain accounts of his earthly life. The starting-point will be here, but the investigator will soon find himself led farther afield. In other New Testament writings he will find interpretations and applications of the gospel which he cannot afford to neglect. Turning back to the Old Testament he will learn that Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others had caught something of the Master's spirit centuries before he lived and taught in Palestine. Other writings in the two Testaments will contribute, be it only by way of contrast, to his knowledge of the gospel. And so it will probably turn out that by the time he is saturated with the gospel his mind will be pretty well saturated with the Bible too.

Where then is the antithesis which our subject implies? Do not saturation with the Bible and with the gospel prove essentially the same thing after all? I venture to think that the two expres-

sions represent two very different points of view. The purpose of this paper is to urge that it should be the gospel rather than the Bible which we set before us as our own measure of values and the standard to which we direct others when we want them to know what Christianity is. There are several reasons why this is true.

1. *Because the gospel is something definite and specific to which men can tie.* The Bible is not. It is a literature rather than a book. It has a real unity, yet it is equally true that its different writers represent very different points of view. To those who have given serious thought and study to the matter this is a commonplace and perhaps causes no difficulty, but of "the man in the street" the same cannot be said. Ask him if he believes in the Bible and he is likely to express doubts about the story of Jonah and the whale, or to put the classical poser as to where Cain got his wife. If he happens to be a man whose intellectual processes evolve on a somewhat higher plane than this, he may reply that such sentiments as "Happy shall he be that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the rock" do not appeal favorably to him; and that in general the narrowness and bigotry and cruelty of the Hebrew people, which seem to be commended in the Bible, strike one as rather like the traits now being displayed by a certain modern nation, which traits, however, are being condemned by all the rest of the world. Even the New Testament may seem to him to show vulnerable points. He may hold that the argumentation of the Epistle to the Hebrews is at some points little more than sophistry, and that

Paul lamentably fails to carry conviction when he attempts to prove that a woman who prays with her head uncovered thereby dishonors her head. He will no doubt admit that there is much good in the Bible, but he finds also elements that seem not good, and this fact is to him a stumbling-block.

Now one way of dealing with this objector is to explain these points of difficulty to him in detail, showing him that there is nothing in them, when properly understood, that should stand in the way of his acceptance of the Christian faith. But it is likely to be a difficult process, and the outcome, to say the least, will be in doubt. Surely there is a better way. Instead of, "Do you believe in the Bible?" why not put the question, "Do you believe in the gospel?" The man to whom that question is put may well hesitate before he answers, but his hesitation will be due to the bigness of the question and what it involves rather than to confusion as to what it means. For the essence of the gospel is not hard, I think, either to understand or to explain. To believe in the gospel is to believe in Jesus—to accept his point of view and accept also his guidance as the only way of making that point of view effective in our lives. That means that self shall cease to hold undisputed sway. Unless its sway is disputed it is both the directing force and the chief interest in life; and that, says the gospel, must not be. The *directing force* must be God—God as we learn to know him in Christ—and our *interest* must be broadened to include all humanity; fellow-men must be placed on as high a level as self.

We have here a definite platform, a specific principle of life. He who accepts this principle and takes his stand on this platform will inevitably turn to the Bible for further guidance and will not fail to find it there. But if he finds also other points of view which seem to him very nearly the opposite of that of Jesus, the fact will not greatly trouble him. It is the gospel upon which he has staked his all. For it to fail him would be tragic indeed, but questions with regard to the Bible are much less serious. It may turn out that books or passages which lack the Christian spirit have value in other ways.

I believe that the church of our day suffers no small loss from the fact that it has inherited the custom of setting forth as its standard the Bible rather than the gospel—a literature of varying moral and religious levels rather than a clear-cut *way of life*.

It has often been remarked that almost anything can be proved from the Bible. Christian Scientists, Russellites, and Mormons find no lack of texts to support their views, while German preachers of the present day are not at a loss to find seeming precedent for both megalomania and frightfulness in the Old Testament. We may say that their exegesis is unsound or their application faulty, but the root of the difficulty lies deeper. For the Bible to be so successfully used in propagating errors and absurdities would not be possible but for the fact that with multitudes of people the Bible usurps the place of the gospel as the Christian standard of life. They have not been taught that the vital question with reference to Mormonism, Kaiserism, or any other

ism is not, whether it can find support in the Bible, but how it appears when looked at from the point of view of Jesus Christ.

Thus the mistaken practice of the church on this point works mischief in two opposite ways. One man sees that the Bible presents a varying standard, and the fact discredits Christianity in his eyes. Another man fails to see this, and he is even more seriously led astray. What neither sees is that it is by the gospel, not by the Bible, that Christianity stands or falls.

2. *Because putting forth the gospel rather than the Bible as our standard will enable us to be more aggressive—to get away from the defensive attitude.* As long as the church allows it to be understood that the Bible is her mighty weapon of offense and defense, so long will she be subject to attack at a hundred points. The criticisms which may be launched against the Bible, and actually have been launched, are without number. From the creation narrative of Genesis to the millennial doctrine of the Apocalypse every supposedly vulnerable point has been under fire. We may answer that at every point the attack has been successfully met—the arguments shown to be worthless or irrelevant. But granting this, the question remains as to whether we are employing good strategy. If Christianity's mission were to defend the Bible, well and good; but such is not the case. To propagate the gospel is our task, and we would best devote our energies to its accomplishment.

There is a weakness here in the church's internal relationships as well as in her attitude toward the world

without. One church body holds aloof from another; one Christian is suspicious of his fellow who professes allegiance to the same Lord. Why? Because the suspected party holds views about the Bible that are deemed unsound. Now it is possible, though scarcely probable, that these views may touch something that is of the essence of the gospel and may therefore give just cause for concern. But as a matter of fact this is not the test that is usually applied. The progress of the Master's Kingdom suffers constant hindrance from lack of harmony in matters in no way vital to the gospel's spirit and ideals.

I do not mean to suggest that the discussion of biblical problems—critical and otherwise—is to be frowned upon. Far from it. No field of scientific investigation excels biblical criticism in importance and interest. But it is a field that belongs to Christian scholarship rather than to the Christian church as such. In so far as it contributes to the church's efficiency in interpreting and applying the gospel its aid should be received with gratitude; but beyond that point the church has little to do directly with its work.

The gospel is altogether the biggest thing in the world. It is the only panacea for human ills; it is able to conquer every foe—this gospel which we have been commissioned to spread, extensively and intensively, throughout the world. With such a commission to carry out, are we going to stop and wait until a verdict has been rendered as to how many Isaiahs there were and whether the Pastoral Epistles in their present form were written by the apostle Paul? We have a right to our convic-

tions on these points, but what could be greater folly than that we should refuse to march shoulder to shoulder with the fellow-Christian who sees them in a different light? What is needed is an aggressive Christianity, and that means a Christianity which takes its stand on the gospel and refuses to allow even the Bible to divert it therefrom.

3. *Because we thus make our message to the world more practical. We appear before men as exponents, not of an ancient revelation, but of a fundamental principle of life.* This is far from denying either the fact or the importance of the revelation. But how are we to convince an indifferent world of its importance unless we can show that it is related to life—life as men live it day by day? And this, I believe, is to be done by pointing men, not to the Bible, but to the gospel—not to religion in various preparatory stages, but to fundamental truth in Christ.

A business man said to me not long ago, "After all, what we need to hear from the pulpit is not so much what Moses and David thought and did in Old Testament times as what we ought to think and do today." I am sure he did not mean that the history and story which make up so large a part of the Bible have no value for us of the modern world, but rather that they have value for the great majority of us only as they have a bearing on life as we know it. Teaching the history of the Hebrews to a Bible class may or may not have more value than if the history of ancient Rome were taught. A sermon about Paul the apostle may or may not exert more influence for good than a lecture on Socrates. If we want our teaching

and preaching of the Bible to meet human need as a lecture on history or a discourse on ethics could not, we must teach and preach the Bible with reference not so much to itself as to the gospel which it contains. If we can make use of what Moses or David thought or did in showing men and women of this twentieth century what loyalty to Christ and their own best selves demands that they should think and do, let us by all means avail ourselves of this material. Otherwise we shall have little use for it in our ministerial work, however much it may interest us as students of history. It is as ministers *of the gospel* that we are sent into the world.

Only a shallow and superficial critic will speak of the Bible as "out of date," yet undoubtedly there are many in whose minds that thought, unspoken perhaps, exists. And a certain type of preaching which regards the Bible as an end in itself rather than a means is largely responsible. So conceived, the Bible *is* out of date—just so many surviving products of an ancient literature. But he who knows the Bible only in that way does not really know it at all. It is its connection with the gospel that gives it its modern—yes, its eternal—character.

The world of our day is not likely to be profoundly influenced by ancient history—even a history as unique as that of Israel or as fascinating as that of the Christian church in its earliest days. The twentieth century is very much occupied with making history for itself. But there is one thing which will command attention in this day of ours, and it is just the thing which we, the heralds of the gospel, have—a

program, a line of action, a *way*, making possible the overcoming of obstacles and the gaining of higher ground. We need make no apologies in offering to the world of today this gospel which has been committed to us.

We are living in a stupendous time. What a day may bring forth no man can tell. Among the forces that are helping to shape the course of events are two that stand forth with special distinctness. The two are at opposite poles one from the other. Each has elements of good, yet the triumph of either would be a grave menace to the world. One is a bigoted nationalism; the other a so-called internationalism that means little more than anarchy. A shining example of the one is to be seen in Germany; Russia serves to illustrate the other just now. But both theories have multitudes of followers right here in America. How shall our nation, and the other nations as well, be guided between these dangerous extremes? The answer, I think, is clear. The gospel must be their guide. Says the gospel, Place the interest of others on every whit as high a level as your own, and it matters not at all whether the "others" happen to live next door to you or across the sea. There is no room for bigoted nationalism in this; and neither is there place for anarchy, where no one's interests are safe. Be it remembered too that the gospel program admits of no rule of one class at the expense of another, whether it be the class of employers or of employed.

It is to be hoped that no Christian—particularly no leader in the Christian ranks—fails to see the great opportunity

that is ours. The future lies in our hands, for in the gospel committed to us we have the only solution for the problems which the future will bring. But we must *use* this mighty weapon. We must place this great standard at the forefront of our ranks where friend

and foe alike can see. Nothing else must be allowed to usurp the position that belongs to it alone. Not even the Bible has a right to stand between the church and the carrying forward of the work which the church's Lord has intrusted to it.

THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN ITS RELATION TO THE PRESENT WORLD-CRISIS

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Never before in the history of man has there been such a complete upheaval in world-affairs happening in so short a time as that which we find ourselves witnessing today. There have previously been upheavals of nations, institutions, philosophies, before this, but none have come so suddenly, or with such force, or have been so complete, as that which has happened since August, 1914. The Reformation was the result of centuries of meditation and silent protest, but the changes which we have witnessed seem to have been born in a night full-grown. The map of the world is being fearfully broken; philosophies are being discarded; fictitious values are assuming their real worth; many things and institutions which we thought eternal have crumbled as dust.

We are not prepared to state just what has caused this great crisis. It does not seem sufficient to say that it

was caused by the murder of the Crown Prince of Austria by the Serbian in Serajevo. There had been other murders committed whose offense was equally as great. Nor does it seem sufficient to say that it was caused by German ambitions in the Near East wholly, nor by conflicting trade interests between Germany and England. It does not seem sufficient to say that it was caused by a sudden impulse on the part of aristocracy to crush democracy and socialism. All of these may have been contributing causes, but back behind them all seems to be something else which has been hidden.

In a little book entitled *Hurrah and Hallelujah*,¹ by Dr. J. P. Bang, professor of theology in the University of Copenhagen, there is given an orderly arrangement of the teachings of Germany's poets, prophets, professors, and preachers since 1874. In this book the

¹ *Hurrah and Hallelujah*. By J. P. Bang. New York: Doran, 1917. Pp. 234. \$1.00.